



# SHINE Brighter: For you and your child

Guidelines for Parents of Pre-Teens



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network  
Keeping hope alive



## Our Mission

Founded in 1985, the Missing Children's Network is a non-profit organization whose mission is to assist parents in the search for their missing child and to educate the public in order to decrease the occurrence of children disappearing.



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## Family Assistance Program

Prevention is without a doubt the most effective means to significantly reduce the risks of abduction, aggression or exploitation of children. It is for this reason that we developed, in collaboration with professionals and law enforcement agencies, a unique and interactive education program.

This guide has been developed to inform and guide parents of pre-teens who wish to be better equipped to contribute to their child's development, taking into consideration the particularities of this stage of life. It is also intended to be a complementary tool to the SHINE program.

## Acknowledgements

The broader prevention program, of which this guide is a part, was made possible by the generous contribution of a private family foundation. It is thanks to this foundation's support and to the collaboration of our valuable partners that the SHINE program and its various related activities have been developed.



Preadolescence is a crucial stage in your child's life. From childhood to adolescence, your child will go through many changes. As a parent, you want to support your child through these changes, guide them in their choices and ensure their safety. We have designed this brochure to help you and your child through this new stage! It will help you gain a better understanding of this new phase of life and provide useful advice and activities that you can do with your pre-teen, all based on our innovative SHINE program.



## Preadolescence

This stage will bring: a thirst for freedom, a desire to experiment and test limits, and the development of greater independence. It is a time when they will develop new friendships and perhaps romantic relationships. In the excitement of these new relationships, some behaviours that are not normally acceptable may become tolerated. In addition, with the emergence and popularity of social networking<sup>1</sup> among pre-teens, your child may become a victim of cyberviolence<sup>2</sup>.

The Internet is becoming increasingly central to the lives of pre-teens. Whether they connect to play online games, or communicate through social networks using smartphones, tablets or computers, these technologies allow them to meet new people<sup>3</sup>.

**“They become very vulnerable and may be exposed to potentially dangerous situations, such as sexual exploitation.”**

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1. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Roblox and Fortnite are examples of online video games and social networks used by youth.
  2. Violence perpetrated through the use of new technologies: Internet, social networks, online video games.
  3. See the section “Being a good online citizen” below for more information.



Preadolescence is also a time in life when self-esteem is built. One's self-esteem may be put to the test by comparing oneself with others, by changes in physical appearance brought on by puberty, or influenced by other people's comments. Our experience shows that it is often easier for pre-teens to identify the aspects of themselves they dislike rather than those they like.

This period can be harder for some. Problems such as conflict at home, bullying, or bad influences can incite a young person to run away from home<sup>1</sup>. Running away puts a pre-teen's life in serious danger. Without protection, they become very vulnerable and may be exposed to potentially dangerous situations, such as sexual exploitation<sup>2</sup>.

During this phase of life, sexual curiosity awakens, and first contacts with a partner may occur. Although the age for sexual consent in Canada is 16<sup>3</sup>, your child may have sexual experiences before that age, especially if they are in a romantic relationship.

*Despite the challenge that this phase of your child's life may seem to present, it is essential to stay connected. It's important to continue to offer safety, love, guidance, support and reassurance, even if your child acts as if they don't need it.*



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1. For more information about runaways, please consult our brochure on the subject.
  2. One in three runaways is a victim of sexual exploitation (statistics from the Missing Children's Network). For more information about sexual exploitation, please consult our brochure on the subject.
  3. In Canada, the minimum age of consent for sexual activity is 16. When a person engages in sexual activity with a youth under the age of 16 and a complaint is made to the police, the consent of the youth under 16 will not be recognized by law. However, consent may be recognized in the following cases. For sexual activities where the younger partner is:
    - 12 or 13 years old: the older partner is less than two years older
    - 14 or 15 years old: the older partner is less than five years older

In all situations, the older partner should not be in a position of authority, trust or exploitation with respect to the younger partner, and the younger partner should not be in a position of dependency on the older partner.





## Helpful Tips: What You Can Do!

As a parent, you play a key role in your child's positive growth. Therefore, we are offering advice, some pointers, as well as a few activities you can do with your pre-teen, based on the philosophy of the Missing Children's Network's Prevention Programs.

### Self-esteem

To support a pre-teen in developing positive self-esteem, we encourage you to always be attentive to their needs and concerns in their daily life. By showing them how much you care, you can reassure them and help them deal with uncertainty. Asking for your child's opinion, building on their strengths, valuing their talents rather than their physical appearance, highlighting their successes and reminding them of your love and presence are all small efforts that go a long way in fostering your child's self-esteem. Sharing a special activity with your child can also strengthen your bond. If you notice that your pre-teen is being bullied, it is imperative that you take action (contact the school or those in charge of the activities) so that children can recover their confidence.

**"Of course, your pre-teen is still young, but they're seeking acknowledgement. So, it's essential to take requests and questioning seriously."**

### Communication

Communicating openly with your pre-teen is essential. They are mature enough to understand certain subtleties and recognize mistakes. This means parents can set an example by acknowledging their own mistakes. A child who observes this will find it easier to be honest in their relationships with others. Of course, your pre-teen is still young, but they're seeking acknowledgement. So, it's essential to take their requests and questioning seriously.

This can be a good time to give them more leeway when it comes to rules. They can be allowed to set some of their own – under your supervision of course!

#### A few tips to encourage effective communication:

- Talk about a subject other than obligations;
- Acknowledge their feelings;
- Avoid long speeches;
- Spend quality time doing activities they enjoy;
- Ask instead of blindly imposing (be careful with control!);
- Give more responsibility;
- Address sensitive topics, even if it is uncomfortable (sexuality, drugs and alcohol).



## Education

Part of the education for pre-teens is to strengthen their competencies and make them think. Basic safety guidelines evolve: they may be allowed to travel alone, but you still need to be informed of their movements and plans. Discussing personal boundaries is important at this age: help your child to recognize what boundaries are, their importance, how to communicate them, how to set them, and how to say NO! Children also need to be able to recognize the signals their bodies send them when their boundaries are being overstepped. Ask them questions: how do they feel when they are uncomfortable? Where can they go for help if they need it? It is important to remind them that their body is their own and that they have the right to decide which kinds of contact they accept.

Education also means teaching your child what their rights are, including in relationships. They should be able to recognize early signs of violence: threats, jealousy, control, belittling, lies, harassment and abuse.



## Being a good digital citizen

The Internet is an increasingly important part of your pre-teen's life. Awareness in this area is necessary. Although the Internet is useful, it has its share of potential dangers. This is why it is important to empower your child with the tools and knowledge needed to ensure their safety online. Remind them to never divulge personal information<sup>1</sup> and to keep their privacy settings activated. As well, make sure you get into the habit of asking your child for permission before posting a picture of them on your own social networks. It all starts with the example you set!

Providing parental supervision of your child's online activities and restricting online access to common areas of the home helps keep your child safer. Your pre-teen may be meeting new people on the Internet and this may compromise their personal safety. Keeping the lines of communication open and showing an interest in your pre-teen's online activities will make it easier for them to confide in you and for you to stay informed. If you are willing to let your child meet their new "friend" in person, it is vital that the meeting occur in a public place and that you or a trusted family member accompany your child.

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1. Examples of personal information: full name, address, phone number, school, passwords and names of family members.



## Activities to do with your pre-teen

The activities suggested below are intended to create special moments with your child, so that you can provide support and protect your child from harm. They provide opportunities for your child to share their feelings or thoughts if they feel the need. While some of the activities require some spare time, it is important to be aware of all the other moments that can serve to reinforce your child's skills. For example, a car ride to an after-school activity or time spent preparing a family meal together can provide opportunities for discussion and opening up.

## Building a support network: Helps develop self-esteem.

Detail in a visual way (e.g. *graphically*) a network of people your child can turn to in difficult times. Your child may want to confide in someone other than their parents, therefore it is important to make a comprehensive list of the various resources and people available (*see the Resources section of this guide, p. 11*).

## Role-play: Strengthens personal boundaries, assertiveness and the development of healthy relationships.

Present daily life scenarios where your child must assert themselves and set their limits (e.g. *kissing family members, fighting with siblings, etc.*). This will help them become aware of what makes them uncomfortable and of their boundaries. It is also a time to help them identify potentially abusive situations. Take your time and enjoy the staging of these scenarios: get out some costumes and make-up, and have some fun!

## Photo montage: Helps develop a positive body image, as well as critical thinking about gender stereotypes.

Put together a collection of photos from magazines (*celebrities and advertisements*) and from personal photos (*print family photos*). Make a collage with your child, asking them to identify any retouches done on the photos and their authenticity by contrasting them with the real images (*personal photos*).



## Creating a character in a video game:

### Helps build self-esteem.

Ask your child to help you create a character in their favourite video game. This may help you become more familiar with the game and allow you to share the activity together. It's also a good tactic for monitoring your child's relationships with other players.

### Support for parents

Parents have many roles: companion, confidant, teacher, etc., but they are not invincible. You may experience more challenging moments in any one of these roles. This is why it is essential to take care of yourself and seek advice when necessary.

The Missing Children's Network is available to assist you through these difficult times (child disappearance, fear of abduction or running away), as well as to support you in your role as a parent. Calling upon professionals in the health and social services fields can be a good option if you are feeling distress or overwhelmed. Above all, keep in mind that you are not alone! There are many other parents living the same difficulties as you. Talk to those around you, chances are you will receive sound advice!







## SHINE: A Prevention Program for Pre-Teens

Now that you know (well almost) everything about preadolescence, it's time to introduce you to our innovative sexual exploitation prevention program for pre-teens - SHINE. Deployed in schools and communities since 2017, this program focuses on the protective factors for pre-teens to help prevent their exposure to this issue. Below are topics the program covers that you can draw upon to support your pre-teen.



Self-esteem • Healthy relationships • Independence • No means no • Empowerment

### Self-esteem

Unfortunately, pre-teens often have a negative self-image. By constantly comparing themselves with their peers and what they see on social networks (stars and influencers), they end up devaluing their own self-image and seeing only the negative aspects of themselves. Focusing on inner value is essential! It is qualities, strengths, values and skills that matter, not physical appearance.

### Healthy relationships

Pre-teens form many relationships: with friends, family and romantic partners. They can easily recognize inappropriate behaviour. However, once they find themselves in a more intimate relationship, they tend to tolerate such behaviour more easily, especially out of love. In order to be happy in their relationships, pre-teens should follow three guiding principles: respect (for self and others), communication (being honest and listening to others) and equality in interactions. The notion of equality is fundamental in social relationships. However, when it comes to gender (male or female), stereotypes can surface. Children learn at an early age, mostly through observation, that certain behaviours or activities seem to be reserved for one gender. As a parent, you want your child to be able to fulfill themselves and follow their aspirations according to their strengths and talents, regardless of gender. Remember that no emotion, occupation or activity is gender-specific.



## **Independence**

Independence is an essential aspect of your child's development. They will want to test their limits and assert themselves. It is important for their development that they be involved in certain decisions, especially those that concern them directly. As parents, encouraging the development of your child's independence will allow them to gain confidence and foster their ability to make sound choices.

## **No means no!**

Boundaries, which are different and specific to each person, are lines that must not be crossed. They can be emotional (feelings and thoughts), physical (touch and displays of affection) or virtual (Internet). Fearing rejection, not wanting to be rude or to disappoint, and wanting to be accepted are all reasons that can make it difficult to set boundaries. However, boundaries are essential for self-respect.

As parents, it is important to set the example: establishing and clearly communicating your boundaries will allow your child to do the same.

## **Empowerment**

It is essential for pre-teens to be able to communicate their emotions, opinions and to be able to say NO, even to an adult. To do this, pre-teens get to know each other through introspection and social interaction. It is important for a parent to encourage their child to be assertive. This will help protect them from potential aggression.

**By encouraging your child to be independent, to develop a positive self-esteem, to set boundaries, to establish healthy and egalitarian relationships, you are directly contributing to your child's positive development!**



# Resources:

## For parents

### Missing Children's Network:

*Support and advice for families whose child has gone missing.*

*Online resource directory: a detailed directory of services for victims of sexual exploitation by administrative region.*

- Tel.: 514 843-4333
- [missingchildrensnetwork.ngo/directory-of-services-for-victims/](https://missingchildrensnetwork.ngo/directory-of-services-for-victims/)

### Ligne parents :

*Telephone or chat support for parents experiencing difficulties with their child.*

- Tel.: 1 800 361-5085
- [ligneparents.com](https://ligneparents.com)

### Canadian Centre for Child Protection

*A collection of resources and services to protect children.*

- [protectchildren.ca](https://protectchildren.ca)

### Cybertip:

*Receives and processes tips from the public about potentially illegal material online.*

- [cybertip.ca](https://cybertip.ca)

### Protect Kids Online:

*A web-based cyber safety resource for parents that tracks digital trends and offers tips on protecting children.*

- [protectkidsonline.ca](https://protectkidsonline.ca)

### Get Cyber Safe:

*Advice and resources for online safety and security.*

- [getcybersafe.gc.ca](https://getcybersafe.gc.ca)



# Resources:

## For pre-teens

### **Tel-jeunes :**

*Telephone (call and text) and chat support for youth experiencing difficulties.*

- Tel.: 1 800 263-2266
- [teljeunes.com](http://teljeunes.com)

### **Kids Help Phone:**

*Telephone (call and text) and chat support for youth experiencing difficulties.*

- Tel.: 1 800 668-6868
- [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)

### **Interligne LGBTQ+ :**

*Telephone (call and text) and chat support for young people questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation.*

- Tel.: 1 888 505-1010
- [interligne.co](http://interligne.co)

### **Need Help Now:**

*Website to help young people remove sexual pictures or videos.*

- [needhelpnow.ca](http://needhelpnow.ca)

### **SOS violence conjugale :**

*Telephone support for anyone living with or affected by conjugal violence.*

- Tel.: 1 800 363-9010
- [sosviolenceconjugale.ca](http://sosviolenceconjugale.ca)





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